



Morning Alert - Monday, December 18, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

NHK gave top play to a report that the special investigative unit of the Tokyo District Public Prosecutors Office and the Japan Fair Trade Commission are investigating allegations that executives of four major construction companies made preliminary arrangements for bidding on contracts for a massive maglev train project. According to the network, the arrangements may constitute a violation of the anti-monopoly law, given that the four major construction firms have won equal contracts amounting to nearly 70% of the maglev project.

TBS, NTV, and Fuji TV led with reports on a fire that broke out yesterday in a building near Omiya station in Saitama, killing one person. TV Asahi gave top play to a report that Sunday marked the sixth anniversary of the death of former North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

Top stories in national dailies included four major construction companies' alleged discussions on contracts for a maglev project (Asahi, Mainichi); a GOJ plan to conduct the Emperor's abdication ceremony on Apr. 30, 2019 as a state event (Yomiuri); survey results showing that companies positive about work-style reform project bigger profits (Nikkei); and cyberattacks targeting online banking users in the Asia-Pacific region by a hacking group linked to North Korea called Lazarus (Sankei).

INTERNATIONAL

Secretary Tillerson reiterates need for pressure on North Korea

All Sunday papers reported extensively on the remarks made by Secretary of State Tillerson at a UNSC ministerial meeting on Friday. The papers wrote that the Secretary expressed his position of upholding the Trump administration's policy of applying "maximum pressure" on the DPRK and

stated that a sustained cessation of North Korea's threatening behavior must occur before talks can begin. The papers wrote that the Secretary effectively "corrected" his earlier statement indicating that the U.S. is ready to hold dialogue with Pyongyang without preconditions. The papers also wrote that the Secretary engaged in heated exchanges with North Korean Ambassador to the UN Ja Song Nam, who said that the DPRK's nuclear program is a necessary self-defense measure against the threat to its sovereignty from the United States. However, Secretary Tillerson countered by saying that North Korea is responsible for escalating tensions. The papers added that China and Russia continued to stress the need for dialogue with Pyongyang by calling on the United States to halt its military exercises near the Korean Peninsula.

Secretary Tillerson, Foreign Minister Kono hold bilateral talks

Saturday morning's Mainichi, Yomiuri, Nikkei, and Sankei reported on a bilateral meeting between Secretary of State Tillerson and Foreign Minister Kono ahead of a UNSC ministerial meeting on Friday. The papers wrote that the two officials confirmed the need to step up pressure on North Korea.

Sunday's Asahi wrote that Kono commented on Friday on Secretary Tillerson's earlier statement indicating the United States' readiness to hold dialogue with Pyongyang without preconditions by saying that the remarks were apparently misinterpreted because his explanation was insufficient. Nikkei ran a similar report adding that the Secretary told Kono at their bilateral talks that his remarks were misinterpreted.

U.S. Special Representative Yun comments on North Korea

Saturday morning's Asahi and Mainichi wrote that Special Representative for North Korea Policy Joseph Yun told reporters in Bangkok on Friday that both direct diplomacy and sanctions are necessary in dealing with North Korea. Yun added that the United States is open to dialogue with North Korea.

South Korea's foreign minister to visit Japan tomorrow

All Monday papers wrote that South Korea's Foreign Ministry announced on Sunday that Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha will make a two-day visit to Japan from Tuesday for talks with her Japanese counterpart Kono. The two officials are expected to discuss North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and the implementation of the 2015 bilateral agreement on the comfort women, in which Japan and South Korea agreed to resolve the issue finally and irreversibly. Kang is also making arrangements to meet with Prime Minister Abe. The Moon administration plans to announce the results of its review of the agreement by the end of this year after hearing Kang's briefing on her talks with the Japanese officials. Asahi wrote that the ROK government understands that Japan will not accept renegotiations of the agreement.

In a related development, the papers wrote that a senior ROK government official said on Sunday

that President Moon may consider visiting Japan separately from an envisaged trilateral summit with his Japanese and Chinese leaders if the schedule of the summit is delayed further. The papers wrote that although President Moon is hoping to visit Japan at an early date to invite Prime Minister Abe to the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in February, the trilateral summit appears unlikely to be convened until after the spring.

Japan to use GSDF helicopters to evacuate Japanese nationals from Korea

Sunday's Sankei gave top play to a report saying that it has learned from several GOJ sources that the GOJ has developed a plan to mobilize GSDF CH-47 helicopters to transport Japanese nationals from Busan, South Korea, to Tsushima, Nagasaki Prefecture, in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. The paper wrote that the GOJ also plans to mobilize ASDF aircraft and MSDF ships for non-combatant evacuation operations (NEO) as an integrated mission between the three branches of the SDF. However, the ROK government has refused to discuss such operations with the Japanese government.

In a related report, the paper wrote on Saturday that the South Korean government has been refusing to discuss NEO plans with nations other than the United States. According to the paper, the GOJ is studying the idea of holding discussions with the ROK as part of a coalition with such nations as Canada and Australia.

South Korean leader visits colonial-era government site in China

All Sunday papers wrote that South Korean President Moon Jae-in on Saturday visited the site of the Korean provisional government in Chongqing, China, that was set up during Japan's colonial rule of the peninsula. Moon expressed appreciation for China's efforts to preserve the site as a museum. Asahi wrote that Moon played up the shared history of South Korea and China in resisting Japan's wartime military aggression in order to improve Seoul's relations with Beijing that have deteriorated over South Korea's deployment of a THAAD system. Nikkei wrote that the moves by Moon will likely cast a shadow over Japan's ties with South Korea.

Japan to seek nonpermanent UNSC seat for 2023-2024

Sunday's Yomiuri and Sankei wrote that during a news conference at the UN headquarters on Friday, Foreign Minister Kono stated that Japan will run in the election for a nonpermanent seat on the UN Security Council from 2023 to 2024. The paper speculated that Japan announced its intention to seek a two-year nonpermanent seat again before its current term expires at the end of this year in order to win support from other UN members.

Australian arrested on charges of brokering North Korea's sales of missile parts, technology

Monday's Yomiuri and Mainichi wrote that the Australian police arrested Chan Han Choi, a naturalized Australian citizen of Korean descent, on Saturday on suspicion of attempting to broker

North Korea's exports of missile parts and technology to other nations and coal to entities in Indonesia and Vietnam. The Australian police said that if successful, North Korea would have earned tens of millions of dollars from the trade.

SECURITY

U.S. military to resume flights of CH-53E helicopters

Monday's Asahi and Mainichi wrote that the U.S. military plans to announce today that it will resume in the near future flights of CH-53E helicopters in Japan after they were suspended following the incident in which a window fell from a Futenma-based CH-53E helicopter onto a local elementary school playground. According to officials of the Okinawa prefectural government and the GOJ, the U.S. military in Okinawa told them on Sunday that the incident occurred due to pilot error and there is no mechanical problem with the aircraft. The prefectural government, which is demanding that all U.S. military aircraft in Okinawa be grounded for thorough inspections, reacted negatively to the plan to resume flights less than a week after the incident. Nikkei, Sankei, and Tokyo Shimbun ran similar reports, adding that the U.S. military is making arrangements to offer an apology directly to the school today or later.

Fallen window incident may affect Nago mayoral election

Sunday's Sankei wrote that the recent incident in which a window fell from a Futenma-based CH-53E helicopter onto a local elementary school playground may affect the Nago mayoral election to be held on Feb. 4 because Futenma relocation will likely become a major issue in the race. The paper wrote that calls for the withdrawal of the U.S. military will likely grow because the Ryukyu Shimpo, Okinawa Times, and other local media outlets will probably carry out an "anti-U.S. military campaign" ahead of the election. Mainichi wrote that the GOJ is becoming increasingly concerned about the possible impact of the incident on the election based on the view that the results of the election are likely to affect Futenma relocation. Nikkei ran a similar report.

Okinawa governor calls for suspension of U.S. military flights over school

Saturday morning's Mainichi reported on Okinawa Governor Onaga's meeting with Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga at the Kantei on Friday. In response to the recent incident in which a window fell from a Futenma-based CH-53E helicopter onto a local elementary school playground, the governor requested the suspension of U.S. military aircraft flights over the school. According to the paper, Suga said in reply that the GOJ will ask the U.S. military to review its flight routes based on the 1996 U.S.-Japan agreement that stipulates that U.S. military aircraft avoid flying over schools and hospitals "as much as possible." The paper conjectured that Suga agreed to meet with Onaga despite their difference of opinion on the FRF construction at Henoko in order to demonstrate that the GOJ is responding sincerely to Okinawa. Nikkei wrote that according to Onaga, the chief cabinet secretary said that thorough investigations should be conducted to determine the cause of the

incident. However, the two officials did not discuss Futenma relocation.

Japan to expand targets of missile defense

Sunday's [Asahi](#) gave top play to a report saying that the GOJ plans to include the idea of Integrated Air and Missile Defense (IAMD) in its National Defense Program Guidelines to be updated in fiscal 2018. Under IAMD, not only ballistic missiles but also cruise missiles will become targets of missile defense. The planned introduction of the Aegis Ashore system is part of this idea. The paper wrote that although the GOJ plans to strengthen Japan's missile defense cooperation with the United States under IAMD, there are financial, technical, and legal issues that need to be resolved.

Abe mentions need to review defense program guidelines

Saturday's Mainichi, Yomiuri, and Sankei wrote that in a speech on Friday, Prime Minister Abe expressed his intention to hold in-depth discussions on a review of Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines from early January to study what is really needed to defend the nation. The papers speculated that Abe is considering the introduction of long-range cruise missiles that can attack enemy bases.

South Korea rejected Japan's offer for teleconference between defense ministers

Sunday's Asahi wrote that it has learned from a source connected to Japan-ROK relations that South Korea turned down Japan's suggestion to hold a teleconference between their defense ministers following North Korea's ballistic missile launch on Nov. 29. The paper speculated that Seoul turned down the idea out of deference to China, which is concerned about trilateral defense cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

POLITICS

Abe launches Instagram account

Monday's Nikkei and Sankei wrote that Prime Minister Abe launched his own [Instagram](#) account on Sunday. He is currently following Instagram users such as his wife Akie, Internal Affairs Minister Noda, and Trade Minister Seko. The papers noted that Instagram is becoming increasingly popular in Japan, especially among the young generation.